

Community Assistantship Program

The Mankato Active Citizenship Report

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The Mankato Active Citizenship Report

Conducted on behalf of
South Central Active Citizenship Initiative

Prepared by
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**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
University of Minnesota
330 Humphrey Center**

Mankato Area Civic Assessment Survey Executive Summary

By
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The Mankato Area Civic Assessment Survey was undertaken by the south central chapter of the statewide Active Citizenship Initiative (ACI). ACI, is a movement which, aims to use civic organizing strategies to renew the civic capacity of our various institutions. The south central chapter seeks to pursue this goal in the greater Mankato area.

This civic assessment survey was designed to accomplish three major goals. First, we wanted a survey that would itself be an organizing tool. That is, the contacts made in distributing the surveys, the information derived from them when returned, and the manner of interpreting the results should all serve the long-term goal of enlisting institutions and their leaders in an ongoing process of civic renewal.

Second, we wanted to do a credible assessment of current civic capacity of our various institutions. Thus, in an early meeting we asked ourselves: "What are the characteristics of institutions that encourage/empower individuals to be active citizens engaged in community building commitments?" We came up with the following list:

Such institutions:

- Encourage/empower member to take responsibility for being informed.
- Devote significant resources (time and money) in efforts to build community.
- Understand the institution and its members to be at the same time part of the problem and part of the solution.
- Have an effective system in place for members to participate in policy-forming activities.
- Foster a climate in which members are engaged and accountable.
- Devote resources to developing civic capacity in the institution and its members.
- Help members to identify how their individual work, and the work of the institution, is meaningful beyond the meaning of the self (i.e. how it serves the common good).
- Assure that planning is part of everyone's job description and everyone is expected to produce resources that advance the plan.
- Interact with other sectors/institutions in service to the greater good.

Subsequently, the survey was developed to test the degree to which these characteristics were present in the institutions whose members we surveyed.

Finally, we wanted the survey to do a credible job of assessing the civic health of a variety of sectors in our community. Though we could not be completely comprehensive and reach every sector within the Mankato community, we felt that if we circulated one hundred surveys in each of at least four sectors, we could potentially yield results that would be significant.

Members of the South Central Chapter of the Active Citizenship Initiative® (and the main architects of this assessment) include:

Kathy Sheran, Mankato City Council

Judy Arzdorf, YMCA

Joan Eisenreich, Community Services

Bob Sutter, (Independent District #77 School Board)

Steve Minnema, (First Presbyterian Church)

Chris Walchuk, (St. Peter and St. Paul Catholic Church)

Mary Lou Ihrke, (University of Minnesota Extension Services in Blue Earth County)

Keith Luebke, (Partners for Affordable Housing)

Chad E. McCauley, (Hubert H. Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs)

The Mankato Active Citizenship Initiative® Report

*Prepared by The South Central Chapter of the
Active Citizenship Initiative® of Minnesota*

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Statement of Purpose

There is a need to expand the base of leadership and citizen involvement in our communities and organizations. Partnership initiative involves representatives from school boards, city council, Partners for Affordable Housing, YMCA, churches, county boards and the University of Minnesota Extension Services. In order to better gauge citizen activity within the Mankato community, we designed, organized and administered a needs-assessment survey. Cross sector collaborations were in need of identification, and the involvement of local businesses was a must.

Methodology

To accomplish our objectives, our committee began to contemplate the structure of the survey questions that would be administered. In an effort to get the response rate at an acceptable level (over 40%) for this project, we determined that the questions should follow this criterion:

- The questions should be short in length
- They should only be accompanied by no more than four answer categories per question
- All of the questions should fit on one page using a twelve point font
- The general nature, of several questions, should allow for the respondent to "fill-in" his/her own responses that are not necessarily reflected in the answer choices provided on the survey

Once we decided on the framework for the question structure, our next step was to arrange the content of the survey questions. In keeping with our mission for obtaining a high response rate, we wanted the questions worded so that they would be easy to read and understood. This meant that the questions would have to be clear and concise thus, minimizing the use of difficult terms that could potentially cause confusion for the respondent. It was a necessity that our question also be worded in such a manner that they would allow us to cross-examine responses between several questions contained within the survey itself. For example, we asked respondents if their organization or congregation expected its members to practice "active citizenship". After selecting between three possible answers, they were then asked if that same organization or congregation fostered a climate in which members are free to contribute ideas and make

suggestions. The significance of finding a correlation (or not) between questions of this nature, allowed us to explore potential differences in the perceptions of active citizenship among the organizations themselves, as well as their members or employees. (Further analysis of these findings can be found later in this report under the **Results** section.)

Within our survey, it was arduous to completely omit difficult terms. So in an effort to minimize the potential for confusion, we felt that it was necessary to provide the following definitions for these terms that were included in the wording of several questions:

- Active Citizenship is a way of living in which people participate in the decision-making processes of their community, acting where they live, work, worship and play to shape policies and create resources which serve the good of the whole community.
- Organization refers to any stable arrangement of people and resources that serves a valid public purpose. (In the survey, the term includes congregations, businesses, hospital, school or non-profit agency. When the survey refers to "your organization" it has in mind the organization asking you to complete this survey.)
- Community Development refers to long-term efforts to improve the quality of life in the community, for the benefit of all of its citizens.

We found that the best way to determine the intensity of how "active" citizens were/are was to survey five sectors of the Mankato Community: **Religious, Education, Private/Business, Non-Profits and Hospitals**¹. Each member of our group distributed one hundred surveys to each sector asking management to then re-issue them randomly to their members or employees for completion². Our committee provided each domain with approximately three weeks to complete the surveys, at which time, the same committee members who delivered the surveys, picked them up. Once the surveys were re-allocated by our committee, we were then able to analyze the response rates and responses themselves.

¹ The Hospital sector chose not to participate in this survey indicating that they conduct their own research.

² Each sector received a different color survey for two reasons; 1.) It provided us with a way of determining which sector we had received survey's back from and, 2.) It guaranteed each sector and its members/employees individual anonymity when filling the survey's out.

Results

The results of our survey provided us with good information as to how different sectors of the community, and their members/employees view "active citizenship" within the Mankato area. In order for you, the reader, to better grasp how each sector responded to the survey, a *master spreadsheet* detailing the responses has been created and is located in the appendix of this report. Furthermore, accompanying the spreadsheet, are four bar graphs highlighting what we felt were the most important questions on the survey: question(s) 1, 3, 4, 8. Because the master spreadsheet is straightforward, we decided that for the purposes of keeping this report short and concise, we should only perform an analysis on questions 1, 3, 4, 6 and 8.

The objective of this project was to determine how active people are within the Mankato community, using the religious, education, private and non-profit sectors as a vehicle for uncovering the environment (within which we felt that active citizenship plays a role.) Our first question from the survey, attempted to ascertain if these sectors expect their employees to practice "active citizenship". Based on the responses from the survey, roughly 76% of the religious sector respondents replied by saying "yes". On the contrary, only 22% of the private sector respondents replied by saying "yes" and 52% in the same sector responded by saying "no", they did not expect their employees to practice active citizenship. (See Table 1.1)

Question #3 asked the respondents if they felt that their organization does enough to encourage their members/employees to become active citizens. The education sector had the highest percentage of "yes" responses with 33%, respectively. In general, most of the responses from the sectors were fairly even. However, of the respondents in the private sector, 30% responded by saying that their sector *does not* do enough to encourage their members or employees to become active citizens. (See Table 1.2)

The education sector and non-profit sector scored the highest ratings in question #4 when asked if their organizations foster a climate in which employees/members can contribute ideas and make suggestions to help organizations better serve the community. In the education sector 64% responded by saying "yes" and in the non-profit sector closer to 70% answered in the same manner. The religious and private sectors were far lower with ratings of 35% and 37%, respectively. (See Table 1.3)

For question #8 we asked the participants if they thought their organization might be interested in working with other organizations to promote "active citizenship". The religious sector had the highest number of respondents saying "yes" at 73%, respectively, while the education sector had the lowest percentage of respondents saying "yes" at 43%, respectively. The private sector had the largest number of respondents who said they would not want to work with other organizations to promote "active citizenship" at 35%, respectively. (See Table 1.4)

As mentioned earlier in the report, our committee performed a cross analysis on several questions to discern if there were any interesting contradictions within the answers. Moreover, we wanted to establish if the questions were able to yield any insight into a collective perception of how participants view "active citizenship", versus the climate in which it usually is cultivated. To better articulate these assumptions, we decided to cross-examine questions one and four as one cohort, while selecting questions six and eight as our other cohort.

Question's #1 and #4

Question one, asked the respondents if they felt that their organization expected its members/employees to practice active citizenship. Question four, asked for the respondents to determine if their same organization fostered a climate in which they could contribute ideas and make suggestions to help better serve the community thus, promoting active citizenship. Of the four sectors, the religious sector respondents responded overwhelmingly that their organizations expect their members to practice "active citizenship". However, when asked if these same religious organizations fostered a climate in which they could promote active citizenship, the same number responded by saying "somewhat". Of the other three sectors, roughly the same amount of respondents who answered "yes" or "no" to question #1, re-enforced their answers to question #1 by responding in the same manner on question # 4. (See Master Spreadsheet)

Questions #6 and #8

The incentive for cross-examining questions #6 and #8, was to help conclude the current level of participation between organizations from various sectors, acting as partners in the promotion of community development. In addition, if organizations responded to question #6 by stating they were not currently working with other organizations, we wanted to gauge their willingness to do so in question #8. The overall perception of all four sectors with regard to this relationship, suggested that many *are* currently working with other organizations and of those who were not, an eagerness to do so was the overall message.

#6 *Organizations currently working with other organizations in order to promote community development:*

Old Town	Valley Industrial Development Corp
Mankato Area Chamber and	Public Achievement
Convention Bureau	Social Services
Library	Retired Senior Volunteer Program
Minnesota State University- Mankato	Firemen
Police	East Showcase
Storefront	Builders Club
Food Shelves	Pennies for Patients
Laws of Life Essay	Yellow Ribbon Program
City	Farm America
Japanese Teachers	Family Resource Center
Jack McGowen's	Project Read
March of Dimes	SVRC
Child Protection	Section 8 Housing
Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital	SCORE
Quality of Life for the Developmentally	Troubled Teens
Disabled	New Focus
Leisure Education for Exceptional	House of Hope
People	

#9 *Organizations with in Mankato area that are notably successful in getting their staff-members to become active citizens?*

Taylor Corp.	St. Peter and Paul's Church
Norwest Bank	The Grind
The Coffee Hag	The Wine Cafe
Immanuel-St. Joseph's Hospital	Chamber of Commerce
Boy/Girl Scouts	Youth in Government
YMCA	Mankato Area Post Office
United Way	IBM
Mankato Rehabilitation Center, Inc.	Americorp
NSP	Children's Project
77 Lancers Marching Band	Girls 2000
Committee Against Domestic Abuse	Leisure Education for Exceptional
Women's Studies Student Association	People
Mankato Public Schools	Habitat for Humanity
1 st Presbyterian Church	Kiwanis
Council Health Promotion	Salvation Army
VINE	

Conclusion and Recommendations

The committee members that reviewed the survey results noted that a majority of the organization members surveyed, felt their fraternity expected its employees to practice active citizenship, indicating good involvement in community development. This was an encouraging finding. The one sector that did not indicate a high ranking for this practice was the private sector. We have concluded that they may not consider this role as part of their mission within the community. It is possible however, that several of the private sector respondents may indeed practice active citizenship in other environments (e.g. volunteer boards, church groups, etc.) The reviewers, are not entirely confident, that growth of active citizenship within this sector, is going to happen.

The contrasting between questions, affiliated with expectations and the decision-making process within the different sectors, revealed a broken relationship between what is expected of employees and if they are allowed to participate in actions that promote active citizenship using their organization as a vehicle for implementation. These dislocated notions, could lead to an opportunity for discussion; would participants feel more ownership if they were more involved in the idea(s)-building stage?

The survey results verified the community's interest in working across sectors, with the highest ranking noted by the non-profit groups. Several of the non-profit organizations that responded to the survey have already begun making strides toward building these relationships within the community. This sector may be the assemblage to facilitate discussion between other groups, especially the private sector.

Some of the data is of no surprise to citizens of this community. Nevertheless, it does legitimize further discussion of active citizenship. The committee hopes that the results will be useful to several leadership training programs and organizations in this community, and others with similar characteristics.

Appendices

Master Spreadsheet Response Rate

	Religious	Education	Private	Non-profit
# Surveys	52	58	41	82
Question 1				
Yes	32	36	15	47
No	2	9	17	15
Somewhat	8	13	9	20
Question 2				
Average	3.7	3.8	2.8	4
Question 3				
Yes	13	19	9	21
No	12	9	13	18
Somewhat	27	30	19	43
Question 4				
Yes	18	37	15	57
No	2	6	10	10
Somewhat	32	15	16	15
Question 5				
Average	3.7	3.6	2.7	3.6
Question 6				
Yes	28	46	13	58
No	24	12	28	24
Question 7				
Average	3.3	3.4	1.7	3.3
Question 8				
Yes	38	25	21	46
No	1	11	14	12
Already	13	22	6	24
Question 9				
Yes	25	20	12	27
No	27	38	29	55

Survey

1. Does your organization expect its employees to practice "active citizenship"? (If you answer "no", please go to question #3)

1. Yes

2. No

3. Somewhat

2. On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your organization's commitment to promoting community development through active citizenship within the Mankato area?

Not Committed

1

2

3

4

5

Very Committed

3. Do you feel that organizations within the Mankato area (i.e. churches, schools, hospitals, businesses, etc.) do enough to encourage their staff and/or members to become active citizens of the community?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Somewhat

4. Does your organization foster a climate in which employees can contribute ideas and make suggestions to help your organizations better serve the community?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Somewhat

5. To what degree, does your organization devote resources (i.e. special programs, money, staff time, etc.) toward the promotion of community development?

Low Degree

1

2

3

4

5

High Degree

6. Is your organization currently working with other organizations in order to promote community development?

1. Yes

2. No

If so, which one(s) _____

7. How active are employees in their efforts to promote community development?

Not Active

1

2

3

4

5

Very Active

8. Do you think your organization might be interested in working with other organizations to promote "active citizenship"?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Already doing this

9. Do you know of any organizations within the Mankato area that are notably successful in getting their staff and/or members to become active citizens?

1. Yes

2. No

3. If yes, which one(s) _____

Table 1.1

Does your organization expect its employees to practice "active citizenship"?
 Average of how committed sectors are in promoting community development
 through "Active Citizenship"

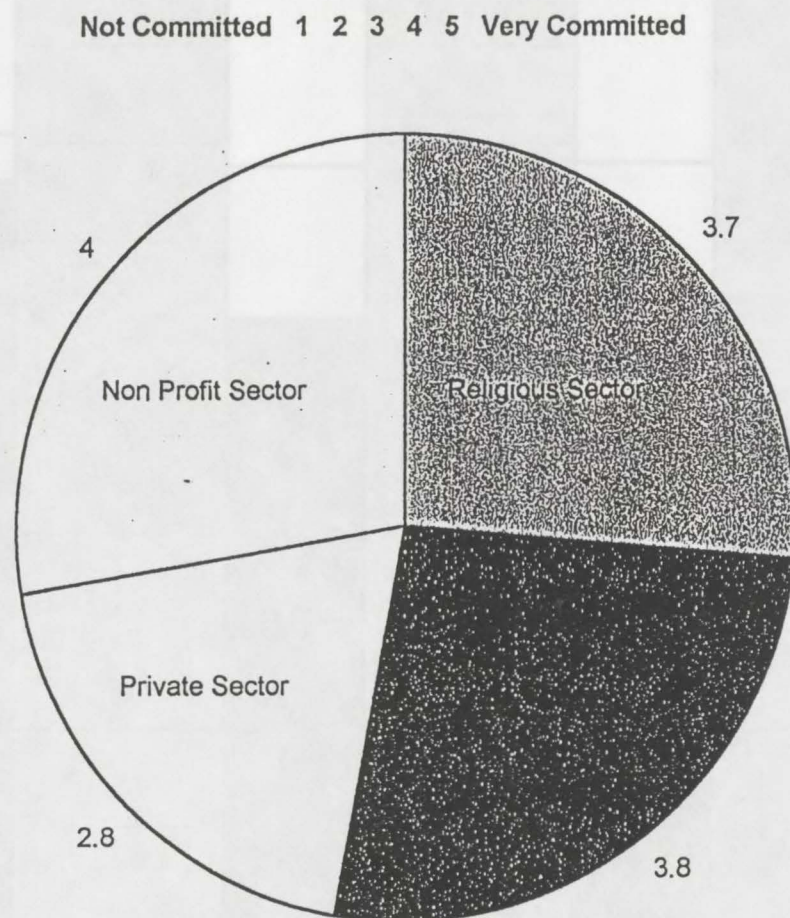


Table 1.1

Does your organization expect its employees to practice "active citizenship"?

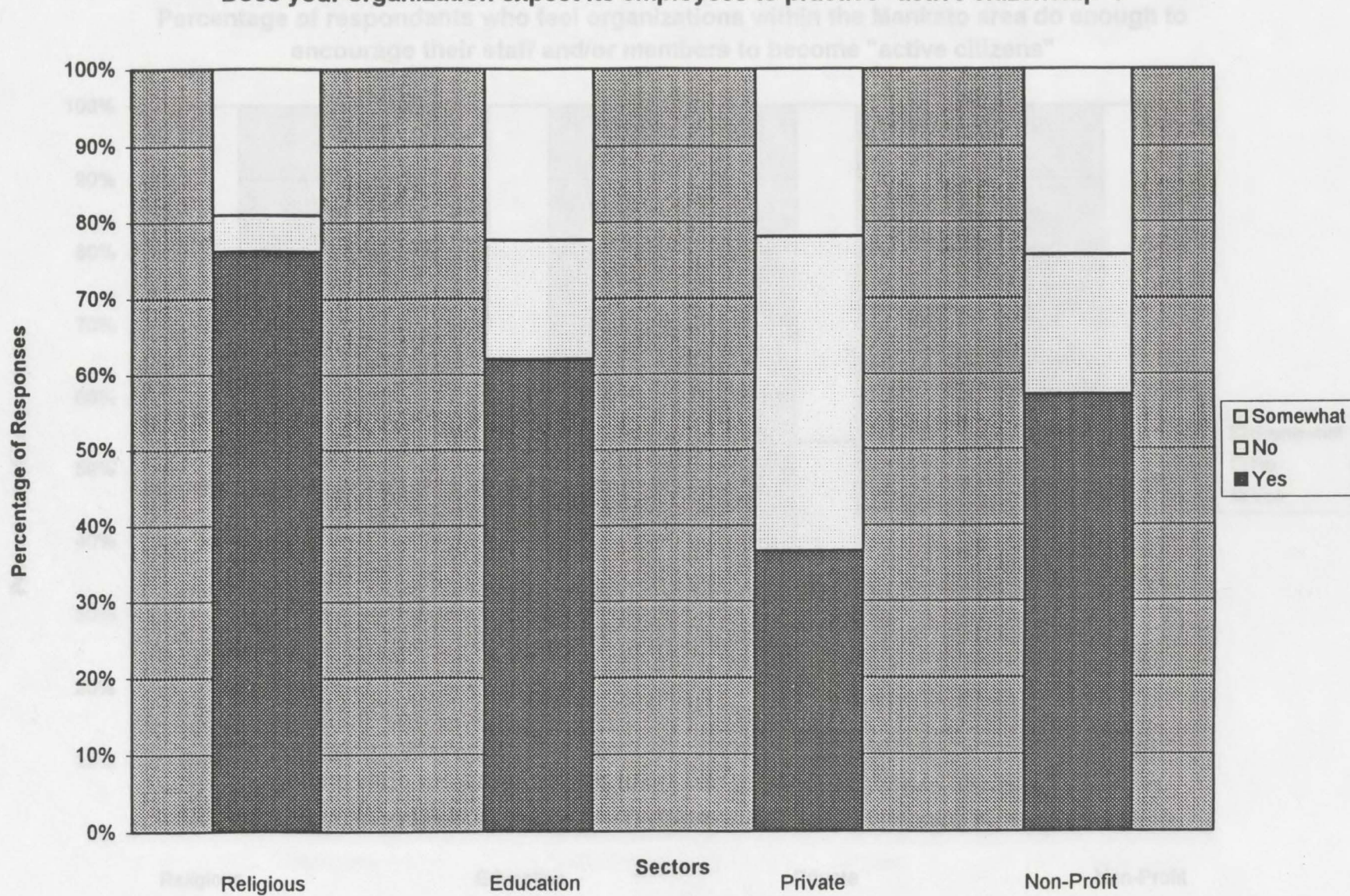


Table 1.2

Percentage of respondents who feel organizations within the Mankato area do enough to encourage their staff and/or members to become "active citizens"

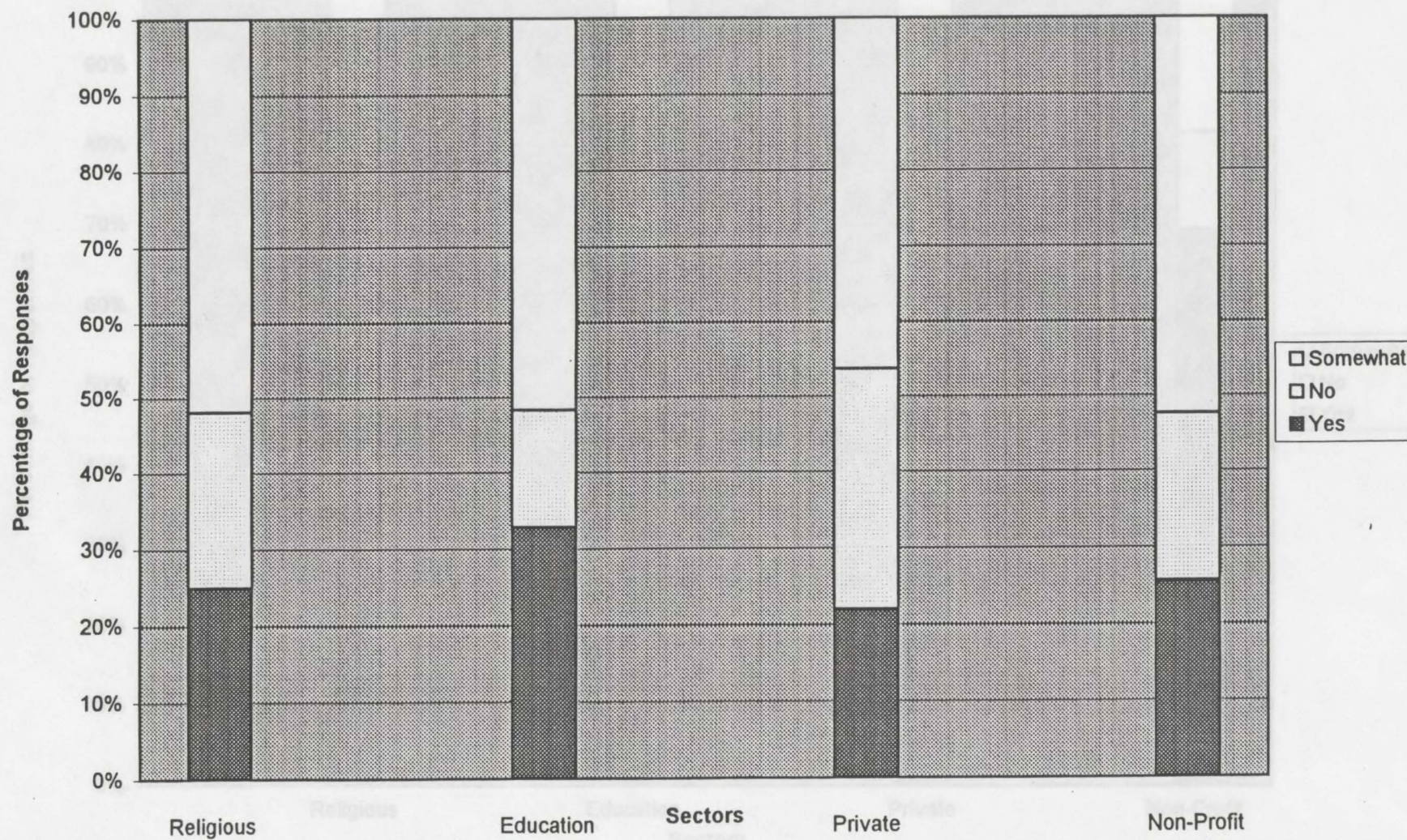


Table 1.3

Does your organization foster a climate in which employees/members can contribute ideas and make suggestions to help your organization better serve the community?

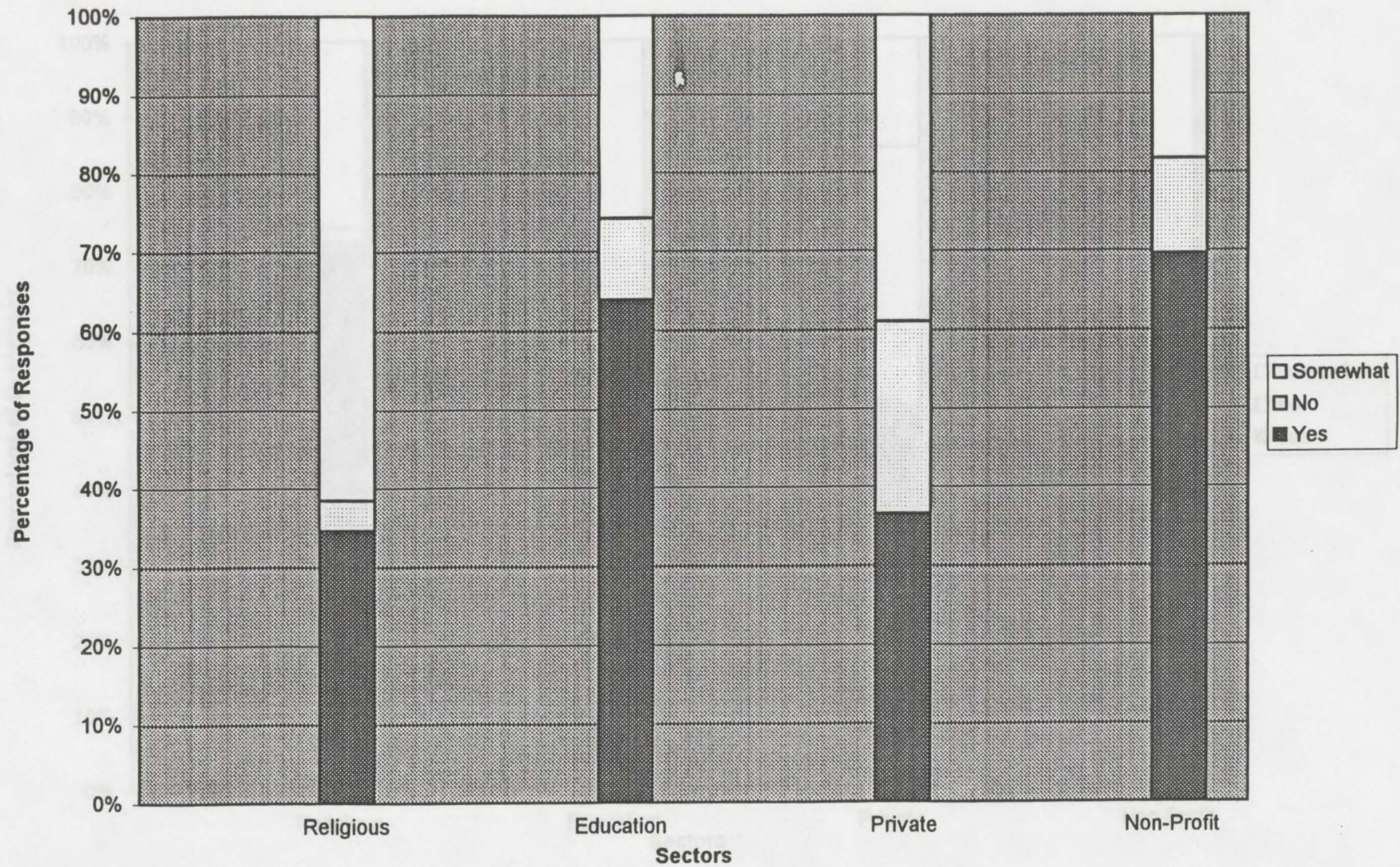


Table 1.4

Do you think your organization might be interested in working with other organizations to promote "active citizenship"

